



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SKINHEAD PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATION IN 2001 DENNY'S STABBING

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Springfield man who was an active member of a local skinhead group pleaded guilty in federal court today to violating the civil rights of two Africa-American men during a racially motivated gang attack at a Denny's restaurant in Springfield, Mo., on June 17, 2001.

Maurice Wilson and Kenny Wright – who are African-Americans – were attacked after they entered the Denny's restaurant with two white women at approximately 1:30 a.m. on June 17, 2001. During the attack, Wilson was stabbed and seriously injured. Wright was threatened with a knife but sustained no physical injuries.

Mark Thomas Kooms, 27, of Springfield, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr this afternoon to participating in a conspiracy with others to injure, oppress, threaten, and intimidate their victims in the free exercise and enjoyment of the rights and privileges secured to them by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, namely the right to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods and services of the Denny's restaurant, a place of public accommodation.

Kooms is the second defendant to plead guilty to a federal indictment returned on Jan. 26, 2004. **Kooms** will also plead guilty tomorrow to the state racially-motivated assault charge brought by Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Darrell Moore.

"This case marks the first successful federal civil rights prosecution in the history of Springfield," Graves said. "These convictions are the first steps toward justice for the victims of this crime. Just as important, they send a clear message to white supremacists and anyone else who acts out of hatred toward others that we will not tolerate bias-motivated crimes."

“Those who perpetrate violence against their fellow citizens will be punished,” said Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, R. Alexander Acosta. “Today's plea is an another reminder that the Justice Department will respond aggressively to bias-motivated crimes.”

Kooms admitted that he and his roommate, **Michael Shane McCormick**, 29, were hosting a party at their Springfield home on the night of June 16, 2001. Later that evening, they and several other persons went to the Denny's Restaurant on Glenstone Avenue, where they ate a meal in a booth at the back of the restaurant. As they were paying their bill, two mixed-race couples walked into the restaurant.

Kooms and **McCormick**, who pleaded guilty on April 7, 2004, were both members of the Midland Hammerskins. Graves described the organization as a white supremacist/skinhead organization based in Springfield. Members of the Midland Hammerskins hate blacks and oppose interracial dating or marriage, Graves said. **Kooms** and other members of the Hammerskins display large white supremacist/skinhead tattoos on their necks, arms, or skulls that express that racial hatred.

Kooms and his group began glaring at the two black men in an effort to intimidate them, Graves said. **McCormick** punched Wilson, then **Kooms** and others physically assaulted Wilson by punching, kicking and stabbing him. **Kooms** kicked Wilson in the head while he was laying on the floor during the attack, Graves said. When a bystander mentioned the police, **Kooms**, **McCormick**, and the others ran out of the restaurant to their cars and sped away. Upon learning of an investigation into the incident, they agreed that they would refuse to talk to law enforcement officers.

Under federal statutes, **Kooms** could be subject to a sentence of up to 10 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. His sentence will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department. The Criminal Section of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the United States Attorney's Office are jointly prosecuting the case.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow